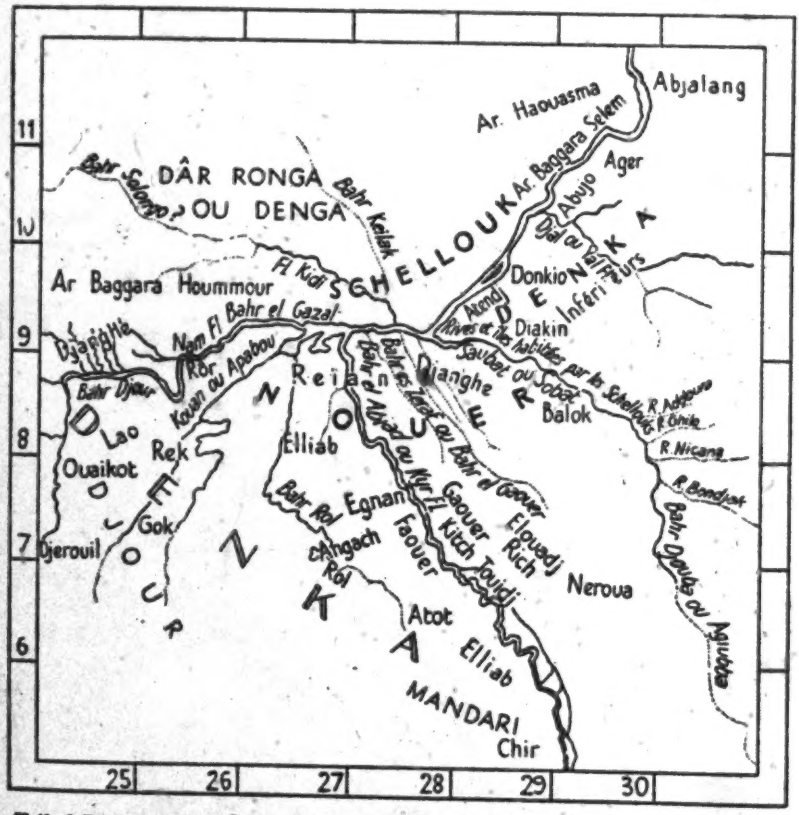
1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

bodies were thrown on the flaming byres and huts. Captives were placed in the centre of the camp, the women being sometimes bound at night to render them more secure. Sexual intercourse is taboo on a raid. Nor may Nuer eat with a captive. A boy captive may not even draw water for them to drink. Only when



Tribal Distribution about 1860 (after V. A. Malté-Brun, *Nouvelles annales des voyages*, 1863).

an ox has been sacrificed in honour of the ghosts, after the return home, and they have been informed that strangers have entered their homesteads, may Nuer have sexual relations with captives or eat with them.

In the following section we describe other foreign contacts, but till European conquest the only foreign relations which may be said to have been expressed in constant warfare were those with the various Dinka tribes which border Nuerland.

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

unlikely that they will all be paid at once and the debt may continue for years. The ceremonies of atonement are performed when some twenty have been handed over, and then the slayer's kin may go about without fear of being waylaid, for the time being at any rate, for they are not safe from vengeance till all the cattle have been paid, and possibly not even then. The chief takes the cattle to the dead man's home. The slayer's people would not venture to accompany him. They are partly distributed among the kinsmen of the dead man and partly used to marry a wife to his name to give him heirs. Even if a man on either side has been killed cattle must be paid by both parties, though perhaps only twenty head by each, for the ghosts must be appeased and the honour of the living must be upheld. Also, sacrifices must be performed to rid the villages of death, which is loose in them and must be sent into the bush, and kinsmen on both sides must be purified from their uncleanness. For his part in the proceedings the chief receives, apart from meat of sacrifices, two beasts, but he has to give one of these to an agnatic kinsman who assists him. Often he gains nothing, as he is expected to give the slayer a cow to help him pay compensation and, moreover, he has had the expense of providing him with lengthy hospitality.

A homicide does not concern only the man who has committed it, but his close agnatic kinsmen also. There is mutual hostility between the kinsmen on both sides and they may not, on penalty of death, that will inevitably fall on those who break the injunction, eat or drink with one another or from the same dishes and vessels the other has eaten or drunk from, even if in the home of a man who is not kin to either party. This prohibition ceases after the cattle have been paid and sacrifices made, but close kinsmen on either side will not eat with one another for years, even for a generation or two, for reasons of sentiment. 'A bone (the dead man) lies between them.' Indeed, all Nuer recognize that in spite of payments and sacrifices a feud goes on for ever, for the dead man's kin never cease 'to have war in their hearts'. For years after cattle have been paid close agnates of the slayer avoid close agnates of the dead man, especially at dances, for in the excitement they engender the mere knocking against a man whose kinsman has been slain may cause a

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

561 701 though many middle-aged men accompany the expeditions and always have their share in inter-tribal fighting and local disputes.

The age-set system of a tribe is in no way its military organization. Men fight by villages and by tribal sections and not by sets. The war companies are local units and not age-set units, and within a company men of different sets fight side by side, though, especially in raids, most of the warriors would be members of the two most junior sets. Kinship and local ties determine a man's place in the ranks. Hence the age-sets are not regiments, though wars and raids are often spoken of as the actions of a certain set because they took place during the initiation period of this set and its members took the most prominent part in them, since skill in arms, love of adventure, and desire for booty are the privileges of youth.

561 885 It is in more general social relations, chiefly of a domestic and kinship order, and not in political relations that behaviour is specifically determined by the positions of persons in age-set structure. When a boy passes into the grade of manhood his domestic duties and privileges are radically altered. His change of status is epitomized in the taboo on milking which comes into force on the day of his initiation and continues for the rest of his life, but it is expressed also in other domestic tasks, in habits of eating, and so forth. At initiation a youth receives from his father or uncle a spear and becomes a warrior. He is also given an ox, from which he takes an ox-name, and becomes a herdsman. From now on, till he is a husband and father, his chief interests are dancing and love-making. Then he becomes 'a true man': 'he has fought in war and not run away; he has duelled with his age-mates; he has cultivated his gardens; he has married a wife'.

[784]

There is a sudden and great change in status from boyhood to manhood, but the modes of behaviour which differentiate these two grades do not distinguish one set from another, for the privileges of manhood are enjoyed by members of all the sets equally. Nevertheless, the sets are stratified by seniority and there are well-defined relationships between them. Before summarizing these patterns of inter-set behaviour we touch on some general characteristics of the whole system.

1: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1940
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

bably always been the same number of sets in existence at any time and these sets always have the same relative positions to each other in the system, regardless of actual groups of men composing them.

It is significant that among the Nuer, as among other East African peoples, the age-set system is the first institution to undergo rapid and great modification under European rule and that the other social systems do not appear to be affected by the changes in its constitution. This tends to confirm the opinion we have earlier expressed, that whilst the age-set system is combined with the territorial and lineage systems in the same social cadre and is consistent with them, the consistency is not an interdependence.

IV

Within the age-set system the position of every male Nuer is structurally defined in relation to every other male Nuer and his status to them is one of seniority, equality, or juniority. It is difficult to describe these statuses in terms of behaviour, because the attitudes they impose are often of a very general nature. The following points may, however, be noted. (1) There are certain ritual observances and avoidances, chiefly between members of the same set, but also between sets. The most important of these are the segregation of the sets at sacrificial feasts, to which we have referred, and the stringent prohibition on members of a set burying an age-mate or partaking of the meat of beasts sacrificed at his mortuary ceremony; but there are a number of other ritual injunctions. (2) A man may not marry, or have sexual relations with, the daughter of an age-mate, for she is his 'daughter' and he is her 'father'. Also, while a man may always have sexual relations with the daughter of one of his father's age-mates he ought not to marry her unless either his father, or her father, is dead, and then only after the parties to the marriage have exchanged beasts in atonement to the age-set of the fathers. (3) Members of the same age-set are on terms of entire equality. A man does not stand on ceremony with his age-mates, but jokes, plays, and eats with them at his ease. Age-mates associate in work, war, and in all the pursuits of leisure. They are expected to offer one

2:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1951
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

at any time to give you a goat or a spear, or even a cow if he can afford it, when you are in need of these things, though you ought some day to make return to him. The relationship between sister's son and mother's brother is one of tenderness. Nuer have often told me how indulgent a mother's brother is with the little children of his sisters. They say, for example, that if a boy living at his maternal uncle's home feels out of sorts and does not want to spread out the cattle-dung to dry in the sun or to perform some other domestic task of boyhood, and the sons of the home think he is shirking work and abuse him, their father will admonish them to leave his sister's child in peace. If this happened at the home of a paternal uncle he would support his own sons and upbraid his nephew for laziness and even beat him. If a man's father is dead and his father's brothers have few cattle or are unfriendly towards him, he may go to live with his maternal uncle, and the uncle's wife will cook for him. He may even marry from the uncle's herd. Also, a youth during his father's lifetime often visits his mother's kinsmen and stays with them for weeks together. A Nuer lad has always a second home if his maternal uncle is a full brother to his mother. A mother's half-brother is regarded as a more distant person.

A man particularly looks for assistance from his mother's brothers when he wants to marry. If a mother's full brother likes his sister's eldest son he may give him two or three cows to help him get a wife, and he may make further contributions on the marriages of the younger sons. However, as in the case of the paternal half-uncle, a maternal half-uncle considers that he has done his duty if he assists one son of his sister's family to marry. He expects his next nephew to marry to approach his brothers for help. Even a maternal full uncle is not obliged to contribute to his nephew's bridewealth. If he refuses aid he cannot be deprived of cattle on the marriages of the young man's sisters. Any assistance he may give is regarded as an act of friendship and not as a return for the cattle he receives. The only cattle the mother's people are obliged to pay to her sons are a male and a female calf, which in eastern Nuerland are known as the *ghok jookni*, the cattle of the ghosts. This claim becomes due when the mother has reached the menopause.

The mother's brother-sister's son relationship is marked by a number of special observances. A youth at his initiation may ask

2:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931,1936) 1951
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

his maternal uncle—generally it would be the mother's uterine brother—for a bull-calf with the markings of the new ox-name he has taken. Though he cannot demand it as a right, he may curse his uncle's herd so that the male calves die if he is refused his request. It seems that the customary way of making this request is for the nephew to make an incision on the ear of the calf he desires. A man may not bury his maternal uncle, and I believe that a mother's brother should not bury his sister's son. Were a man to bury his maternal uncle he would die of *keth nara*, a disease which is said to cause white patches on the skin. The same disease may attack a man who hears that his maternal uncle has been wounded or cut himself severely and does not visit him and place some of the blood on his foot. Should the nephew not hear of the uncle's wound and contract the disease, he visits him and gets him to rub soot from the bottom of a pot on the affected surfaces. A man and his maternal uncle may not tether their cattle together in the same kraal, though the cattle may graze together. If one of the uncle's beasts dies the nephew may not skin it, for were he to do so he would destroy the uncle's herd and people would say that 'he had spilt the cattle of his uncle to the ground'. An uncle may not give his sister's son a spear-shaft, for the gift might cause him serious injury. A man and his sister's son must not use the same sleeping-hide or sleep in the same hut. These rules, especially those which forbid a man tethering his cattle in his uncle's kraal, skinning his uncle's beasts, and sleeping in the same hut as his uncle, seem almost designed to keep the two apart, to prevent a youth identifying himself with his maternal kin instead of with his paternal kin.

The maternal uncle is the kinsman who most often blesses a lad in the Nuer way of blessing, by spitting on the head. Grandparents may sometimes do this, but other relatives rarely. If a man comes frequently to visit his sister and partakes of her hospitality and does not occasionally spit on her child's head, the child may get the disease I have mentioned above. It is also said that when a maternal uncle rises during the day from a nap in the ashes of the hearth and his sister's son rubs the ashes off his back he must then spit on the lad's head. But if the blessing of a maternal uncle is desired, his curse is believed to be among the worst, if not the worst, a Nuer can receive, for, unlike the father, a maternal uncle may curse a youth's cattle, as well as his crops

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

the Leopard-Skin Chief. The killer himself is no longer concerned individually and has nothing further to do until the negotiations for settlement are finally concluded except to collect the cattle of compensation of which he will pay a substantial proportion.

After compensation has been paid, a ceremony called *piec mac* is performed by the Leopard-Skin Chief and his assistants at the cattle-byre of the killer. During the period of his seclusion his home has been closed and neglected and weeds allowed to grow. An idiomatic expression in Nuer is *luak-de cerike luak gwan thunge*, which means 'his cattle-byre is unclean like a killer's cattle-byre' and is used in a derogatory manner towards anyone considered dirty or untidy. The byre must therefore be ceremonially purified and swept and fire re-kindled (*piec mac*).[1] The Leopard-Skin Chief and his assistants clean the frontage and open the byre and his wife builds the fire-screen (*buor*), the symbol of the Nuer homestead, and kindles fire with fire-sticks. A sacrifice is then made.

The Leopard-Skin Chief concerned with Hostile Groups; ji ran and ji thunge

As soon as a man is killed a state of feud (*ter*) begins between the *ji ran* and *ji thunge*. They must scrupulously observe certain taboos and avoid spiritual contamination, which manifests itself in physical disease known as *nueer*.[2] They may neither eat nor drink together and they may not intermarry (and this rule may continue for many generations after settlement).[3] The Leopard-Skin Chief is able, by the performance of certain rites, to neutralize the effect of spiritual contamination, and he may be called upon to do so when an involuntary breach of taboo has occurred, or in rare cases he may be asked to remove the taboo altogether after compensation has been paid and the case finally settled. This ceremony is known as *math*, and is rarely performed unless the two groups are very closely related.

Ceremonies, Rites, and Acts of Mediation Performed by the Leopard-Skin Chief in the Settlement of a Feud

The Leopard-Skin Chief is first approached by the *ji thunge*, who ask him to call upon the *ji ran* to find out whether they are willing to accept compensation. He then approaches the *ji ran* on behalf of the *ji thunge* and appeals to them to settle the matter peacefully. They are expected by convention to show considerable opposition even though really anxious

[1] *Piec mac* is a normal expression used to denote the kindling of fire with fire-sticks, but in almost all Nilotic languages it has also a ritual meaning associated with the idea of purification.

[2] *Nueer* usually takes the form of painful but not necessarily fatal diarrhoea. The word *nueer* is not confined to cases of illness caused by a breach of taboo associated with a state of feud; other breaches of traditional observance may lead to *nueer*.

[3] 'There is blood between them'—*teke riem kandien*—refers to the taint of a past feud between kinship groups which may be a bar to intermarriage. See example, p. 147.

8:Howell E, G-5 (1942-1944)1954
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

Kap tang

695 In this ceremony, although the name *kap tang* refers to the spear of the Leopard-Skin Chief, the most important ritual association is clearly with the earth, and the ceremony amounts to a symbolic and sympathetic enactment of the process of burying the dead. A small hole is dug in the ground by the Leopard-Skin Chief, and this represents the grave; over it are placed sprigs of *Calotropis procera* and *Balanites aegyptiaca*, for these are usually placed over the newly buried dead as a protection against the diggings of hyenas. Over this hole the Leopard-Skin Chief puts his spear, while the disputants squat on either side and place their right hands on the spear-shaft and each swears his innocence or belief in the other's guilt as the case may be. It is believed that the one who is telling a lie will be seized with sickness possibly followed by death unless an antidote is applied. If either party falls ill he will hurry to the Leopard-Skin Chief, who reverses the process and thereby removes the contamination. Sometimes the ritual is less elaborate; the disputants simply pass under the outspread leopard-skin held by the owner.

Math

695 This is usually, but not always, applied in cases of homicide where
784 the killer has not confessed or is quite unknown. It is performed by the Leopard-Skin Chief, who fills a gourd with milk from one of the cows belonging to the dead man. Those who protest their innocence are then expected to drink of the milk. This act openly defies the taboo on drinking or eating which automatically comes into operation between the hostile parties in a blood-feud. Indeed there could be no graver danger than drinking the milk of the dead man's cow if there is blood between them. Since contamination is extended to all kinsmen of the unknown killer, it is unlikely that anyone would agree to take the oath unless he was absolutely certain of the innocence of all his kin.

9:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1936 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

individual as he passes from infancy to old-age. Thus each person passes successively into one grade after another, and, if he live long enough, through the whole series—infant, boy, youth, young married man, elder, or whatever it may be..... In East Africa, where the age-organisation is highly elaborated, each age-set normally passes from one grade to another as a whole."[1]

In this paper we are dealing mainly with the change of status brought about by initiation from Boyhood to Manhood. Initiation involves, however, not only a change from one social grade to another but also entrance into a set in which the individual remains for the rest of his life. The members of each set have a common name, like status, and like patterns of behaviour towards one another and towards members of senior and junior age-sets.

Among the Nilotes of the Sudan the age-set system appears to be most important among the Nuer on account of both the severity of its initiation and the social significance of the privileges associated with it. Among the Shilluk age-sets do not seem to occupy an important place in social organisation and the institution has an appearance of decay. The Seligmans record that at the time of their visit "it was of little importance and was probably dying out."[2] Among the Dinka it gives the impression of being of more importance than among the Shilluk and of less importance than among the Nuer, and the same may be said of the age-sets of the Nilo-Hamitic Bari discovered by Mr. Whitehead.[3]

The chief officer in respect to initiation into age-sets is the *wud ok* and this is in keeping with the fact that initiation largely concerns a boy's contact with the cattle. Before initiation he milks the cows and looks after the small calves and sheep and goats. After initiation he is strictly prohibited from milking the cows and he acts as herdsman to the adult cattle. During the period of initiation it is taboo for him to have any contact with the cattle and his first action on its conclusion is to re-establish this contact. After initiation also he receives a bullock or two from his father, and becomes legitimate owner of a bullock name and is permitted to dance and sing behind the bullocks.

[1] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. *Man*, 13, 1929.

[2] C. G. and B. Z. Seligman. "The Pagan Tribes of the Southern Sudan," pp. 72-3.

[3] *Id.* pp. 170-2 and 263-4. Cf. the lengthy account of age-sets among the Nilotic Lango of Uganda by J. H. Driberg.

9:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1936 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

are brewed and a bullock or sheep is killed. It seems that they do not always kill an animal but they must do so when it is an eldest son who is being initiated or a boy whose eldest brother has died. Members of the father's age-set eat the meat at night and they alone. During the night they sing songs amid the cattle. On the following day, in the afternoon, they drink beer and leap about behind the bullocks and there is a lot of horseplay. The womenfolk seize the penises of members of their husbands' age-set, the father of an initiated boy especially being subject to this treatment. They tie cord to the penises of the men and pull them while the men retaliate by tugging at the skin aprons of the wives of their age-mates. A man of the age-set of the father of an initiate will lift up the apron of his wife (the boy's mother) and will utter a ceremonial cry into her vagina. This man is generally the woman's *cocanda*, that is to say a paternal cousin of her husband. Only members of the father's age-set and their wives will partake in this horseplay in the homestead of the father of the initiate. Thus if the boy is the son of a *maker* all members of the *maker* age-set will take part in the festivities, together with their wives, while members of the other age-sets, *e.g.*, the *Dangunga*, will have their own fun in a neighbouring homestead with their wives. Younger people will not go near these festivities of their elders because they might see the genitals of their mothers and aunts. All those who have married daughters of the men who are sporting themselves will also give the festivities a wide berth lest they should see the nakedness of their mothers-in-law. This dance is called *bul ruathni* or *bul ruath dholi*. They say that they make this horseplay because they are glad that their child has become a man.

After the cutting, which is called *gar*, the boys are shut up in a hut. This is not built for the purpose but is temporarily vacated by the women of the family in whose homestead the operation has taken place.

Between the cutting and the ceremonial exit from the period of convalescence the boys are known as *cōt*. The boys suffer excruciating pain during the first two days or so after the operation and nothing can be done to relieve their agony. These first few days are recognised as being a time of great danger for the boys since the wounds may break open again and great loss of blood ensue. Youths and girls are prohibited from visiting the boys during this period since they are likely to be sexually unclean. Especially are pregnant women kept away from the vicinity

9:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1936 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

881 •784 and only those women who are nursing babies or who have reached the menopause are allowed near their hut. One or two men, often a youth who was initiated the year before, and who abstain from sexual relations for the time, will keep guard over the boys to prevent their heads from falling sideways, so that the grass circle which they use as a pillow sticks to their temples and in the effort to get it loose the wounds are re-opened. They must sleep on their backs with the backs of their heads on the grass pillows. An old woman may also sleep in the hut and assist in looking after the boys. [757] Should the wounds break open and bleeding be renewed the place is cauterised with a *rip* which has been heated in the fire.

Until they are taken to the river and cleansed at the end of their seclusion the boys must strictly avoid any contact with the cattle. This is a ritual prohibition, a *biil*, which involves a curse if it is infringed. Not only are they prohibited from going among the cattle but they must even avoid treading on cattle dung. It is said that if a cow approaches them the boys must immediately run away into the shelter of their hut. It is believed that a breach of this prohibition would prevent the formation of regular scars (*piar*) on the forehead so that all the marks of initiation, the pride of manhood, would be obliterated with the exception of the *woc dohl*, the cut just above the eyebrows. In this connection Miss Huffman records of an initiate that, " When one asks him if his wounds are healed he will always say ' not yet,' but one may find out if they are really healed by asking him if he has gone among the cattle. If not, the wounds are still sore, but if he has been with the cattle it means that the wounds are well healed although the boy will not say so for fear someone with the evil eye should hear of it."[1]

881 262 During their convalescence the boys are given food in liberal quantities and are probably better fed than at any other time in their lives. Considering that the Nuer is always hungry and frequently starving this abundance of food makes an impression that it is hard for us to appreciate fully. When speaking of their experiences at this period one finds that the festal nature of their convalescence is frequently stressed. They say that if any youth who has not been freshly initiated looks longingly at their food the initiates will belabour him while if it were an older man they would not strike him but neither would they invite him to partake of the meal. The boys share and share alike, as befits comrades, in any food

[1] *Op cit*, p. 32.

9:Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936)1936 FJ22 Nuer FJ22

warfare because they would certainly be killed if they did and the same applies to old men. Nevertheless a good number of the older men who are more active than fellow-members of their age-set will accompany expeditions. Moreover, war is organised by tribal sections based on locality and communal sentiment and not by the age-set system. The whole of a district or a tribe is summoned to take part in a feud or in a raid on the Dinka, and anyone will accompany the expedition who wishes to do so. They do not call up certain age-sets and leave others at home. During the actual fighting, while it is natural that people of roughly the same age will fight side by side, there is nothing compulsive about this arrangement and men of all ages fight together as a section. Thus when two sections unite for warfare we shall find the men of each section fighting with their section and not with their age-set. In the same way a man is not expected to fight only warriors of his own age-set but will engage with whomsoever he finds opposite to him. Hence we may say that the Nuer age-sets are not regiments, and indeed have no specific military functions, but that since age and the ability to bear arms are necessarily related it happens that active warriors are recruited from certain age-sets. On the other hand the social and economic relations of the age-set system are outstanding and it is in them rather than in its ritual that we must look for its significance.

In its economic relations Nuer social life comprises three groups of persons—the women, the men, and the boys. The productive labour of women differs in many respects from that of men but the most prominent distinction between their activities is in milking the cattle. A man may not milk the cows. This is not simply a customary division of labour, as in cooking for example, but is a ritual prohibition or taboo. Were a man to milk a cow all sorts of misfortunes would follow, in particular the death of the cow. The restriction of milking to women has far-reaching effects on their position in Nuer society. But in this respect boys are classed with the women, for they are allowed to milk the cows until they have been initiated into manhood. Consequently initiation means that a boy ceases to milk; he severs his association with women's work; he becomes a man in the sense that he joins the men's group as distinct from the women's group in social life.

If cessation from milking is the most outstanding change in a boy's occupations after initiation it is by no means the only one, for his whole

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

Chapter Seven

SOME NOTES ON RELIGION, SUPERSTITIONS, AND MORAL LAW

NUER GODS

776 THE Nuer has long feared and worshipped he knows not what. There are various gods, Deng, Wiu, Cwol, and others. Some have power over rain, some over crops, disease, death, or lightning.

778 825 Some animals are considered sacred, but what is sacred to one man is not necessarily held sacred by another. It may be the crocodile, or the land crocodile, or a certain kind of snake. Every Nuer is certain to have a sacred animal which he will neither kill nor eat.

782 Sheep and cattle are sacrificed on various grounds in order to appease one god or another.

[776] 766 When a person is struck by lightning and killed he is said to have been taken by the god of lightning—Cwol. His body is laid upon a rack that is made in his house or barn and then covered entirely—over, under, and on all sides—with wood, ash, and soil. The door of the house is closed and the house is left desolate except for its silent owner. A person who has been struck and killed by lightning is never buried in the ground as others are.

● 784 No one will touch a person who has been stunned by lightning until he regains consciousness, for fear the god in him may be transmitted by contact.

778 A Nuer always considers the relatives of one who has been killed by lightning as sacred.

[826] [784] Any one who has some physical or mental deformity may be considered as having a god in him and be regarded as sacred and avoided for that reason.

781 The Nuer worship is a worship of fear. The missionary feels as if he were living in Old Testament times, and

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

196 576 264 Nuer use it for the attitude and behaviour expected of a man towards his wife's parents and to a lesser extent her other kinsmen also. He expresses his respect particularly by abstaining from eating in their homes and from appearing naked before them. A newly married woman respects her husband's people, especially his parents. She is circumspect in her relations with them, avoiding the parents as far as is practicable. Until her first child is born she may not eat in the home of her husband's parents—that is to say, in her husband's home. Newly wedded husbands and wives respect one another. In public each treats the other with marked reserve and they will not eat together, or even see each other eat or drink, till some time after their first child is born. Of the many European habits which are strange to Nuer the one I have heard them speak of with the greatest disapproval is that of a man eating [551] with his wife in public. Husband and wife also respect each other's name by avoiding its use. Sweethearts display similar behaviour. The respect a husband shows to his wife's parents and her respect for his parents is shared in varying degrees by the kin on both sides and for varying periods of time. I need not discuss details here. It may, however, be noted that avoidance with regard to food and drink between affines which is likely to have altogether lapsed, except in the case of the husband's avoidance of his wife's parents, and to have been relaxed even in his case with time and the birth of children, is demanded with extreme vigour should the wife bear twins. Then the paternal and maternal kin of the twins are for a short time in the position of parties to a blood-feud. They may not, under penalty of death (*nueer*), eat or drink or share a pipe together until sacrifices, the meat of which is divided between them, have been made.

196 583 784 There are also avoidances concerning bridewealth cattle which derive from these relationships of respect relating to marriage. A bride respects the *ghok lipe*, the cattle of her betrothal. These are the cattle her future husband hands over in earnest of his intention to marry her, and they count as the first payment of her bridewealth. She will not drink of their milk, lest she harm the cattle by doing so, till after the ritual consummation of the union, and possibly not even then, for I was also told by some Nuer that while she is still newly wedded and has not yet borne a child (*ciek ma kau*) she abstains from the milk of the cows her husband's people have paid for her. Likewise, even when a husband can drink milk

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

in the home of his parents-in-law they avoid offering him milk from the cattle he has paid them. Further, if there is a divorce and the bridewealth cattle are returned to the husband's people they sacrifice a goat before they drink of their milk.

Nuer 'respect with regard to food' unrelated people (*nei ti gwagh*) of the opposite sex, especially if they are unmarried and possible sweethearts. They will not eat with them or even see them, or be seen by them, eating and drinking, and food must not be mentioned when they are both present. The sexes, unless they are kin, avoid each other in the matter of food. Nuer feel so strongly about this avoidance that I was obliged to observe it strictly myself.

Another situation in reference to which one hears the word *thek* is homicide. I discuss it in greater detail in Chapter XII. A man who slays another respects water—he may not drink—until a priest has made sacrifice and cut his right arm. Then until the blood-feud is closed by payment of cattle and by sacrifices the kin of the slayer and the kin of the slain may not eat or drink from vessels from which the other has eaten or drunk. They respect the vessels and the food and water of the other party. Even to use the same vessels at the home of a third party who is in no way connected with the feud may entail the most serious consequences. A third party may cause death to one side or the other by eating or drinking with both.

Another use of the word *thek*, which, as always, contains the idea of avoidance, is in reference to burial and to mortuary sacrifices. Those who bury a corpse respect water—they may not drink—until they have been cleansed. Members of a dead man's age-set abstain from the meat of the cattle sacrificed at the ceremony held to close the period of mourning for him. They are said to respect the meat. It has been noted earlier (p. 55) that people may not eat or drink in the homes of close kin of a person struck by lightning before they have sacrificed. Another use is in connexion with the eldest child of a marriage. He respects the spoons of his parents and the sleeping-hide of his mother. He is careful not to eat with the first or sit on the second. Were he to do so he might cause the mother to be barren and injure the father, himself, and the cattle. A man is also said to respect his as yet unconceived children by abstaining from congress with his wife when she is menstruating[1]

[1] He is not said to *thek*, respect, his wife when she is menstruating. He

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer F122

196 784 [834] [841] [234] and while she is suckling an infant, for a child born of union in these forbidden periods is a child of misfortune. A woman in her periods respects the milk of cows; she may only drink goat's milk at this time. Nuer also use the word *thek* to refer to the prohibition on men milking cows. Men respect the cows with regard to milking. Milking is done only by women and boys. It can happen, however, that on journeys there are no women or boys present, and in these circumstances men may milk the cows on condition that each gets another to milk his cows for him. I learnt in 1936 that a youth, Tot, who in 1931 had been a member of my household, had died as a result of having milked a cow at night in the byre of his home and drunk the milk.

196 776 784 One of the commonest uses of *thek* is, as we have seen, in reference to totems. A man respects his totem by refraining from harming it in any way (pp. 64 seq.). The respect is mutual and the totem should refrain from harming those who respect it. We have also noted earlier (p. 129) the respect relationship between twins and birds. The word is also used for the attitude of a man towards his fetish.

196 784 *Thek* has, therefore, in all its contexts of usage a sense of deference, constraint, modesty or shyness, or a mixture of these attitudes. It seems often to carry as part of its load of meaning a feeling of embarrassment which is entirely lacking in the ordinary behaviour of Nuer towards persons and nature. The behaviour associated with it is formalistic and includes always avoidance and abstention, though it will have been observed that these need not be absolute. A man does not in any way avoid his cows except with regard to (*ke kwi*) milking them.[1]

The purpose and function of these respect relationships are

observes or honours (*luth*) the days of her indisposition. On the other hand, *thek* may be used to speak of a woman being in her periods, it being understood that what she respects are the cattle. The word can thus be used as a polite euphemism for 'to menstruate'.

[1] While a man does not respect a cow dedicated to a spirit, Dr. Smith tells me that he can be said to respect it with regard to milk and marriage. Only members of his family may drink its milk and it must not be used for marriage, unless in either case the spirit gives its consent. Dr. Lienhardt tells me that a man can also be said to respect such a cow with regard to urine, in that he does not use it for domestic purposes. As I was not aware of these particular usages of the word *thek* I can only record this information without discussing it. A breach of the prohibitions would certainly involve liability (pp. 39–40) but it would not be classed as *nueer*.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

evident. They are intended to keep people apart from other people or from creatures or things, either altogether or in certain circumstances or with regard to certain matters, and this is what they achieve. Some of them have important secondary functions in the regulation of the social order—for example, those which determine behaviour between affines and between parties to feuds; but we need not now inquire why they concern certain persons, things, and situations and not others, nor what these persons, things, and situations have in common. We are concerned only with the fact that a violation of the prohibition is to a greater or lesser degree a fault which in many cases brings disaster to the transgressor.

Failure to show respect when there is a *thek* relationship is more than a breach of decorum. It entails to a greater or lesser extent religious sanctions. It is true that in some cases, as, for example, to be seen naked by a mother-in-law, the breach is chiefly regarded as one of good manners which, since the offence was at the worst one of negligence, can be made up for by presenting the offended person with some small gift. But even here a religious sanction is not entirely lacking, because it is believed that failure to respect the parents-in-law may injure the children, and this would ultimately be attributed to God. Nuer say that were a man's nakedness to be seen often by his wife's parents his children might go blind. However, it is not the sight of the genitals in itself which is thought to cause injury so much as the disrespect in not observing the convention. That this is so may be seen from the fact that though Nuer near the American mission at Nasser, Dr. Mary Smith tells me, now often wear shorts, they continue to wear as well and over them when they visit their parents-in-law the wild cat's fur traditionally worn on such occasions. We may surmise that the convention is felt by Nuer to have also a moral significance from the violent indignation I have witnessed in female relatives of wives at exposure by husbands in their presence although they were not their mothers-in-law and the exposures were entirely accidental. The violence of their complaints would have been out of proportion to the offence were it merely a matter of etiquette. To see inadvertently an unrelated person of the opposite sex eat, or accidentally to be seen eating by the same, is perhaps the lack of respect nearest to a simple, though serious, breach of manners, but Nuer nevertheless give the impression of believing that some misfortune may follow from it.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

Nuer speak of these conventions with regard to nakedness and eating as *theak ma tot*, minor respect. That they do not think of them as faults of the same order as breaches of the other rules of respect—*theak ma dit*, major respect—is also shown by the fact that though all the rules are alike referred to as *thek* they do not speak of a breach of either the nakedness or the food convention as *nueer*,[1] the word, the verbal form of which is *nuer*, which they use when speaking of breaches of some of the other rules and the consequences of them. We have earlier met the word in reference to eating human flesh (p. 19) and to drinking from a pool contaminated by a corpse (p. 130). A breach of the more serious rules of *thek* is likely to cause death to the breakers or their children or cattle, especially if the breach was wilful. I was told that *nueer* is a sickness of the whole body which generally begins with violent vomiting, but probably any serious sickness following the breach of a *thek* taboo would be described as *nueer*. Sometimes the offender's life can be saved by timely action, and his recovery is thought to be likely if his offence was unintentional. Sacrifice is made to God and in certain circumstances an infusion of cleansing medicines may also be drunk.

The attitude Nuer call *thek* is thus different from mere avoidance of doing things considered to be unbecoming. Failure to conform to *thek* prohibitions involves the culprit in something more than *puc*, shame, and its counterpart *cany*, a word which has the general sense of 'to despise'. Any conspicuous breach of morality or decorum is shameful in Nuer eyes, as when a man steals or is rude to his father. It is shameful—to give another example—for a man, especially if he is unmarried and is courting girls, to eat birds or eggs. Only a *bar*, a poor man without cattle, would eat them. I was frequently taunted by Nuer on this score: 'are you not a man that you eat such little things?' Nuer also regard the eating of most wild fruits as contemptible and they think it both disgusting and shameful to eat carnivora, monkeys, zebras, most reptiles, and all insects. The breach of a *thek* rule may be shameful and despicable, but when it is spoken of as *nueer* it is also sinful.

There are, as will be seen, prohibitions with religious sanctions

[1] It should perhaps be made clear that the word *nueer* has nothing to do with 'Nuer', the name of the people. 'Nuer' is not the name by which the people refer to themselves but is what foreigners call them.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

which do not form part of respect relationships and are, therefore, not called *thek*, but *thek* is the most important Nuer category of interdiction. An infringement of the other prohibitions is not usually spoken of as *nueer*, though Nuer nevertheless say that all such infringements are like *nueer*, which is a standard by which they judge, and to which they tend to assimilate any serious breach of an interdiction with religious sanctions. Before discussing these we may, therefore, note that the most prominent feature of the worst forms of sin is that it kills; and it is significant that the word *nueer* means in Dinka 'to destroy' and 'to kill',[1] a sense it also often has in Nuer when the consequences of sin are being referred to.

Except in the case of a breach of the weaning interdiction, which is discussed further later, and in that of a rare breach of the milking interdiction, the transgressions so far mentioned are unwitting offences. It must be rare indeed that anyone transgresses in these ways knowingly and deliberately. The transgressions we shall now consider are generally deliberate actions.

If *nueer* is the most important of Nuer sin concepts the one most frequently spoken of is *rual*, incest, which Nuer say is '*cere ke nueer*', 'like *nueer*', and they may use the verbal form *nuer* when speaking of its consequences, for example, '*ce nyiman nuer*', 'he brought death to his sister' (by having congress with her). It should be noted that Nuer say this, and also that they sometimes liken both *nueer* and *rual* to *biit*,[2] a curse and a prohibition of which a conditional curse is sanction, because their doing so shows that though there are different words for different sorts of fault they are also thought to have something in common. They all destroy and they are all also, in one way of thinking of them, conceived of as pursuing, or tracking, the transgressor to disaster.

I have given elsewhere[3] a fairly lengthy account of Nuer prohibitions on intermarriage and on extra-marital congress, so the subject may be treated briefly here and with reference only to such features of it as are relevant to a discussion of religion. Nuer

[1] P. A. Nebel, *Dinka Dictionary*, 1936, p. 119.

[2] Indeed in some cases it is not easy to say whether an act should be described as *nueer* or as a sort of *biit*, e.g. a girl drinking the milk of her bridewealth cattle or an eldest son using his parents' spoon.

[3] 'Nuer Rules of Exogamy and Incest', *Social Structure*, edited by Meyer Fortes, 1949; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer*, 1951, chap. ii.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

young men attend dances, which therefore do not take place at this time. Also, they may have no contact of any kind with the herds other than with the oxen with which they are segregated. It is to be noted further that the borrowing from kin and neighbours of oxen for slaughter by youths whose families are unable to provide them with suitable animals is no ordinary loan but is of a peculiar and ritual character. The owner of a beast who is asked for it by a youth may not refuse the request, and not only for social reasons but also, says Dr. Howell, because 'he would run the risk of spiritual contamination resulting in sickness or even death among the members of his family'.[1] Nor may he demand repayment for some years. These facts considered in the light of the great reluctance, to say the least of it, of Nuer to kill an ox other than for sacrifice suggest strongly that a slaughter on this scale has some religious significance. I asked Dr. Lienhardt and Dr. Smith to inquire about this matter. The former informs me that an old man makes an invocation over one of the oxen, which stands for all of them, and the latter that the older men who have contributed the beasts make invocations over them, though they do not consecrate them with ashes. It would seem, therefore, that if their slaughter is not a proper sacrifice it has to some extent a sacrificial character. It is significant also that not only is the killing obligatory but also that each youth ought to provide an ox for slaughter, an ox for a man, for we seem to have here again the equivalence of a man with an ox, which is the basis of piacular sacrifice: and it can easily be seen that the death of an ox at the termination of the rites of initiation would be a sacramental act appropriate to the whole setting of initiation.

Except on those rare occasions when dire necessity or custom compels them to do so, Nuer do not kill cattle except in sacrifice; and it is regarded as a fault to kill them *'bang lora'*, 'just for nothing', the Nuer way of saying that they ought not to be killed for meat. This is clearly shown, apart from the facts I have already instanced, by the statement that an ox slain simply from desire for meat may *cien*, take ghostly vengeance on, its slayer, for it has *cuong*, right, in the matter. Maybe Nuer do not take this very seriously, but that they say it at all is an indication of how they regard the matter, for, as we have seen, they fear ghostly vengeance and hold that it operates only because God is permissive,

[1] Ibid., p. 176.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

seeing that an injustice has been done. The man had no right to take the life of the ox and by doing so he committed a fault. In sacrificial invocations Nuer explain to God why the life of the ox is being taken, and they may also address the ox and tell it why it is being killed—not that they think it understands. They are justifying themselves in taking its life.

Consequently I was not surprised to learn from Dr. Mary Smith, whom I asked to inquire into the question, that when cattle are killed in time of famine Nuer, though they do not consecrate the beasts, may make an invocation over them asking God that 'the meat may be soft in their stomachs and not bring them sickness'. This does not constitute sacrifice, there being no sacrificial intention, but it shows that there is a feeling of guilt about killing animals for food even when hunger compels it, and we can say that all cattle, and also sheep and goats, are reserved, or set apart, for sacrifice and their lives should not be taken, except in the special circumstances I have mentioned, for any other purpose. In that sense we may speak of cattle as being 'sacred'. If we do so, however, we must note that they are not sacrificed because they are regarded as sacred intrinsically, or for reasons extraneous to the sacrificial situation, but, on the contrary, they are regarded as sacred only because they are reserved for sacrifice and in the sense defined by that purpose. I have discussed beasts of the herd only and not those of the flock because, as we have noted earlier, in sacrifices they are 'cattle', surrogates for oxen. It is pre-eminently their role to play the victim's part in sacrifice and they are consequently also reserved for sacrifice, but the sacrificial equivalence is always between *ran* and *yang*, man and 'cow', never between man and sheep or goat, for even when it is a sheep or goat which is being killed the ideal equivalence is preserved in speech.

In order that the sacrificial killing of beasts of the flocks and herds may be seen in a wider setting both of the taking of lives of creatures and of the eating of flesh, it should be realized that, except for fish, Nuer seldom kill wild creatures but rely almost entirely on the flesh of their domesticated animals for meat. For religious reasons they are averse to killing birds, except occasionally the ostrich, to which the same symbolism does not attach, for its feathers; and also reptiles, except the turtle and the crocodile (perhaps occasionally the monitor lizard). But even where there is no objection to killing animals, as in the case of mammals, Nuer